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**House Appropriations Committee Approves HB 977 to
Recognize and Support Former and Current Military Personnel**

Tallahassee, Fla. – Increasing the state’s commitment to Floridians that have worn our nation’s uniform, the House Appropriations Committee today approved CS/HB 977, relating to military support. The bill addresses many facets of military support, and contains provisions that expand tax and financial incentives for current and former military service members, provide for the recognition of veterans and strengthen Florida’s commitment to retaining existing military installations within the state.

“Our nation remains the great place that it is today thanks to Americans who have answered the call to defend our freedom,” said House Appropriations Committee Chairman Denise Grimsley (R-Sebring). “These proposals recognize the sacrifices our military servicemen and women have made and provides military households with important tax and financial incentives for choosing to live in the Sunshine State.”

Tax and financial incentives in the bill include the addition of two military operations to the list of designated operations eligible for an additional exemption of ad valorem taxes for deployed servicemembers who receive a homestead exemption, the issuance of special use license plates to certain veterans without payment of the license tax, and the expansion of vendor preference in state contracting to include certain businesses owned & operated by certain veterans.

Additionally, the bill contains provisions that support former military personnel and military installations. These provisions include:

- Creating Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council to select nominees for induction into Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame;
- Streamlining defense grant programs to better reflect the state’s interest in protecting and preserving the military presence in Florida by creating the Military Base Protection & Florida Defense Reinvestment Grant programs and eliminating programs that have not been utilized;
- Repealing the Florida Council on Military Base & Mission Support and transferring its functions & responsibilities to Florida Defense Support Task Force;
- Providing for the issuance of Combat Infantry Badge, Vietnam War Veterans', Korean Conflict Veterans', Silver Star, Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross, & Air Force Cross special use license plates;
- Designating annual "Purple Heart Day";
- Authorizing the establishment of Military Veterans & Servicemembers Court Program;
- Creating pretrial intervention programs for certain military veterans;

- Creating misdemeanor pretrial veterans' treatment intervention program for certain military veterans;
- Requiring certain Florida College System institutions & state universities, and encouraging certain independent postsecondary educational institutions, to provide priority course registration for recipients of federal GI Bill educational benefits; and
- Providing honorary designations of certain transportation facilities in specified counties.

The House also recently passed CS/HJR 93, Homestead Property Tax Exemption for Surviving Spouse of Military Veteran or First Responder, which proposes an amendment to the Florida Constitution to allow the Legislature to provide, by general law, ad valorem homestead property tax relief to the surviving spouse of a military veteran who died from service-connected causes while on active duty or to the surviving spouse of a first responder who died in the line of duty. This proposal would be on the November 2012 ballot if passed by the Senate, and must be approved by at least 60 percent of Florida voters. The House also passed CS/HB 95, known as the "Fallen Heroes Family Tax Relief Act." The act, sponsored by Representative Shawn Harrison (R-Temple Terrace), would go into effect if the amendment from CS/HJR 93 is approved by the voters, and it would grant full homestead property tax exemptions to spouses of first responders who have been killed in the line of duty. Both of these measures have been sent to the Senate.

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